

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
RUTGERS

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ESSEX COUNTY AIDS NETWORK

Essex County AIDS Network
Meeting Minutes April 12, 1989

The focus of this meeting was "Adolescents: Uninformed, Unconcerned, and At Risk," and four guest speakers shared with the Network their concerns and some of the activities and programs involving adolescents with which they are involved: Phil Linfante, Director, Essex County Division of Youth Services, and chairman, E.C. Youth Service Commission; Beverly Canady, The Bridge; Jeanne Mirabella, Hyacinth Foundation, and Rev. Christine Leslie, Integrity House.

By way of introduction, Ruth Banks, ECAN Coordinator, presented some pertinent information drawn from the report of the Department of Health and Human Services' Secretary's Work Group on Pediatric HIV Infection and Disease: HIV disease is now the 9th leading cause of death among children 1-4 years, and the 7th leading cause of death among young people aged 15-24. Although the 13-19 year olds with AIDS represent less than 1% of all AIDS cases at present, more than 20 % of all AIDS cases have been diagnosed and reported in people between 20 and 29 years of age.

Because the latency between infection and full blown syndrome of clinical AIDS may be as much as 8 years, a significant number of those diagnosed as young adults are assumed to have become infected during adolescence. Considering AIDS cases in young adults as a by-product of behavior during the adolescent years puts the issue of adolescent HIV infection into its true perspective.

One of the most significant impact factors is the high rate of STDs among adolescents: 25 % of all Sexually Transmitted Diseases occur in adolescents. One out of seven teens aged 15-19 (some 2.5 million teens) contract an STD each year. This indicates a potential for rapid transmission of disease. The rates of STDs (gonorrhea, PID, syphilis, chlamydia) are higher in sexually active adolescents ages 10-19 than in all other age groups of sexually active Americans.

When we add to this the "armor" of youth - their sense of invincibility, immortality and invulnerability -we can see that adolescent behavior has the potential for spreading HIV infection not only laterally but vertically when they start to reproduce.

And while we can conclude that all adolescents are at risk, some are more at risk than others: 50 % of adolescents with AIDS are Black or Hispanic.

The report asks the question, Is Geography, Destiny?

Phil Linfante: The Essex County Division of Youth Services has three basic components: 1. Family Crisis Program; 2. Youth Service Commission; 3. Youth House and Youth Shelter.

1. The Family Crisis Program funds nine community based agencies to provide services to children and families in crisis situations. The services are free and last year some 2300 families were served.

2. The Youth Service Commission is responsible for doing a needs assessment and identifying resources in order to develop criteria and guidelines for developing programs and services to meet the needs. Through the mechanism of an RFP (Request for Proposal), the Commission seeks responses from community agencies for programs to serve youth at risk. Five programs are currently being funded by DYFS through this RFP, including an Early Intervention and Screening Program at the Beth Israel Medical Center; 24-hour response system by Irvington Youth Resource Center, counseling for Hispanic youth by La Casa de Don Pedro, a program at Integrity House targeted at court referred youth. The Commission is composed of representatives from various county offices, agencies, clergy and the general public.

3. Youth House: In 1988, there were 3000 admissions to Youth House; in the State of N.J. that year, there were 12,210 admissions. The majority of the admissions are male (88%), some 70% are from Newark; 75% of those admitted are there for possession of cocaine, 45% for possession of a weapon, and about 30% for auto theft.

The average stay in the Youth House is 120 days; 50% stay 3 days or less; 40% stay over 30 days. Among the issues Mr. Linfante brought up for discussion were the lack of mental health services for children and adolescents, particularly the adolescents who end up in the Youth House. They bring their problems with them, like baggage, but there are too few programs or services for them once they get into trouble with the law. We need, he emphasized, programs to work with the kids before they get into trouble, when they're in the Youth House, and once they're released. We need more family centered or family oriented programs which can serve the needs of families, not just one identified acting out adolescent. He noted that we have one of the highest public school dropout rates in N.J., and this problem is compounded by a lack of jobs and a youth population lacking job skills.

Beverly Canady, The Bridge: All students are at risk for AIDS and for pregnancy. At the School Based Youth Service Program at Irvington High School, Beverly noted that the ratio of students to counselors is 360 to one. Many of our young people never learned to handle stress, so our young ladies share their bodies with men as a way of finding out who they are. Our young men need role models. They need to define themselves. Too many of our young people have not learned to communicate their feelings, have little respect for or trust in adults, and so have developed their own language, in a sense, in order to distance themselves from adults. Too many of our young people have not learned how to read, cannot even fill out a job or school application, but they're smart enough to organize various illegal operations which net them hundreds of dollars a week, if not a day. Most of all, too many of our young people have no sense of themselves, no sense of self-identity. Every child/adolescent needs to be somebody. The SBYS program runs groups, teaches the participants to run the groups, to develop self respect and then respect for others, and provides various tutoring and counseling services. Beverly invited interested individuals or agencies to visit the program.

Jeanne Mirabella, Hyacinth Foundation: Jeanne continued to emphasize the theme that all kids are at risk. All people, but particularly youth, need a feeling of self-esteem in order to reject unhealthy behavior. Information doesn't necessarily lead to behavior changes, so one of her current projects involves developing outreach teams to reach targeted population groups, such as adolescents. Most recently, she has developed a Women's Outreach program, which has identified some 62 types of women at risk for AIDS. The next step is to identify strategies to reach these women. She will train outreach workers to understand how to identify those skills needed in order to change behavior and how to teach those skills to others. She is available to either come to your agency or program, or she can train an individual to become an outreach trainer.

Rev. Christine Leslie, Integrity House: Integrity House is primarily an adult drug and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment center. People do drugs to feel better, and kids are doing what they've been taught. As a culture, we don't teach our young to talk out their feelings and pain, we don't share our feelings easily or our lives.

Rev. Leslie described some recent programs being targeted to adolescents which have been implemented at Integrity House. These include the PIE program, a court diversion program for adolescents and their families; and the CARE program targeted to 13-18 year old unemployed dropouts at high risk of addiction. When she talks about AIDS education, she talks about life education. The bottom line is to empower people to come to decisions on their own. Rev. Leslie shared with the group the Five P's that we should all have in order to be healthy, productive citizens. We all have to know how to be a:

1. Person - have a sense of self, a self-identity, be secure enough to be able to reject unhealthy behaviors, and understand the consequences.
2. Partner - be able to share our lives with someone.
3. Parent - understand normal child development.
4. Producer - work, have some employment that fulfills a need.
5. Player - be able to have fun

Announcements

An English speaking support group for HIV+/ARC/AIDS: Thursdays from 5-7 p.m. at St. Michael's Medical Center. On the last Thursday of the month, families are invited.

A new Spanish speaking group for HIV+/ARC/AIDS: Wednesdays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at SMMC.

A new family and significant others group began April 27, and will run every Thursday under the direction of Sister Mary Grather, Pastoral Care Office, SMMC.

For support groups for patients, contact Sister Gabriela or Maria Lebedynec at SMMC.

June 7 - An AIDS Awareness Day- UMDNJ/CMHC. Hours: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Agencies are being invited to participate.

Anyone with experience in counseling HIV infected adolescents is asked to contact the ECAN so that experience can be shared with those who are just now beginning to confront the problem.

NEXT MEETING of the ESSEX COUNTY AIDS NETWORK
Wednesday, May 12

Place: E.C. Dept. of Citizens Services
15 So. Munn Ave.

East Orange
Third floor conference room

Topic: AIDS and THE LAW

If you know or work with someone who would find value in our Network meetings, please feel free to invite them.

Attendance: Maria Lebedynec, Sr. Gabriela Triolo, 877-5524. Jeanne Mirabella, 246-0204. Rev. Chris Leslie, 623-0600. Diane Ryan, 609-984-8491. Jacqueline Jones, 744-2222. David Weintraub, 648-4074. Trish Bailey, 648-5031. Louise Messier, 648-6910. Jenny Daboub, 465-1133. Brenda Scott, 733-3097. Beverly Harris, 733-3083. Pat Gaskins, 266-5484. Roslyn Yeskin, 733-2562. Ron Weiss, 266-5498. Arlene Steinbacher, 733-2564. Rev. John W. Hansen, 609-393-3440. Pat Genito, 456-5430. Kathy Russo, 675-3817. Beverly Canady, 399-7797. Fernando Morris, 456-5648. Linda Walker, 645-6482. Teresa Cummings, 674-5780. Hazel Butler, 456-6064. Teresa Saunders, 456-4169. Patrick Moore, 733-3538. Phyllis Kandi, 877-4512. David Meshowski, 609-984-5940. Jeannette Hernandez-Cordero, 622-3570.